

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1, 2, 5 and 7, add new claim 8, and amend the remaining claims as set for in the following listing of claims. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

2. (Canceled)

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2, in which two chronological serial numbers are computed ~~(65)~~ by linear approximation on the basis of two series of successive item fingerprints, and a distance between the two computed chronological serial numbers is measured.

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim ~~4~~8, in which the search for a match is performed on the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass in an exploration space centered around the fingerprint associated with a computed chronological serial number.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim ~~4~~8, in which the chronological serial number is constituted by the juxtaposition of a sorting center number, of a sorting machine

number, of a sorting outlet bin number, and of a chronological index corresponding to chronological order in which the items are loaded into the sorting outlet bins.

7. (Canceled)

8. (New) A method of processing postal items, which method comprises following steps during a first pass for sorting the items:

taking a digital picture of a postal item,

deriving from said picture a digital fingerprint which is a logic identifier for the item, and

storing the fingerprint of the item in a memory in correspondence with data about the item, and

the method comprises following steps during a second pass for sorting the items:

taking again a digital picture of a current mail item,

deriving from said image a digital fingerprint for the current item, and

searching the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass for a match with the

fingerprint of the current item in order to retrieve the data about the item by

association in order to sort the current item, if no match is found the current item

is rejected,

wherein said method further comprises during the first sorting pass:

associating in the memory the fingerprints of the successive items with corresponding

chronological serial numbers, chronological order being the order in which the

items are loaded into the sorting outlet bins and

during the second sorting pass, the method further comprises :

recording data relative to matching obtained between fingerprints from second sorting pass fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting,
retrieving, for a series of successive item fingerprints for which matches have been obtained with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, a series of chronological serial numbers associated with said matching fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass,
computing an estimated chronological serial number for a current item by means of a linear approximation from said series of chronological serial numbers, and
searching for a match with the fingerprint of the current item on the basis of the estimated chronological serial number to limit exploration space for matching fingerprints,
and

during the second sorting pass, if no series of successive item fingerprints matching with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass can be obtained, the method comprises :

scanning, in full, fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass until a match is found with the fingerprint of the current item is obtained, if no match is obtained the current item is sent to a reject outlet.